

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 13, 2020

The Honorable Charles P. Rettig
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig,

We write to express concerns about the delays and obstacles many of our constituents have faced when contacting the Internal Revenue Service about their Economic Impact Payment (EIP). Hundreds of thousands of Oregonians are relying on their EIP to help make ends meet, and it is critical that the IRS complete the distribution of EIPs and immediately reduce any pending backlogs.

We appreciate that the IRS has reported completing delivery of most EIPs to eligible recipients, but our offices are still working to assist far too many constituents who have not received their payments and, often, who cannot access any information about the status of their payments. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, at least 158,000 eligible Oregonians did not receive automatic payments.¹ Our constituents who are still awaiting payments need this resource to pay for food, rent, utilities, and other necessities.

The obstacles we've identified that are preventing people from receiving the information they need from the IRS are outlined below. Please respond with additional information on the steps you are taking to address the following problems:

EIP Information Line

Most constituents report that the EIP information line, 1-800-919-9835, largely remains unanswered or that they face lengthy hold times before speaking with IRS staff. In your testimony before the Senate Finance Committee on June 30, 2020, you stated that the IRS would soon be back at full working capacity including the 50,000 teleworking IRS employees.² With the continued phase-in of the agency's operations, we expect that this will increase capacity and allow the IRS to complete all pending payments.

Many constituents who call are not told when they should expect their payment, if the payment was already sent, or the form of the payment. This is particularly troubling for those who

¹ Chuck Marr et. al., *Aggressive State Outreach Can Help Reach the 12 Million Non-Filers Eligible for Stimulus Payments*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/aggressive-state-outreach-can-help-reach-the-12-million-non-filers-eligible-for>.

² 2020 Filing Season and IRS COVID-19 Recovery, 116th Congress. Page 4, (IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig).

continue to receive error messages on the *Get My Payment* tool or have not received payment but have their direct deposit information on file. There is a serious need for improvement to the information provided and additional staffing to address the amount of inquiries by phone.

- On May 18, you announced the recall of 3,500 phone operators.³ Why did this increase in staffing not reduce wait times on the EIP information line?
- Of the few callers who do get a live answer on the stimulus payment information line, they are typically redirected to the Frequently Asked Questions on the IRS website. How have phone operators been trained to answer questions about EIPs?

Congressional Inquiry Inbox

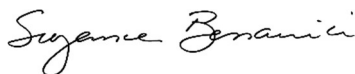
In addition to delays for phone-based assistance, Congressional inquiries regarding EIPs are not receiving timely responses. Many requests submitted by our caseworkers to the IRS-designated inbox do not receive a response. In many cases where there is a response to a Congressional inquiry, it has been several weeks later and then only to indicate that the case is referred to the “Wages and Investment Team for further investigation.” How will you improve communications with our offices and commit to addressing remaining cases quickly?

Online Outreach and Tools

Another barrier preventing low-income people from accessing their much-needed EIPs is the continued reliance by the IRS on online outreach and digital tools. The Non-Filer tool was a welcome addition for many households that have not received payments for dependents or not received any payment at all. But with social distance orders in place to protect Americans during the public health crisis, very low-income families and individuals, seniors, and people experiencing homelessness face additional challenges to accessing online communications. We recognize that you are collaborating with associations and organizations to mail out information on these payments to communities that are harder to reach; however without a mail-in form option or operating Tax Assistance Centers there is a serious risk that many will never get payments. For people within the digital gap, how is the IRS going to collect their information and make sure they receive status updates and their EIPs?

We appreciate the efforts you and your agency have taken during this period; however the lack communication to some of the most vulnerable Americans awaiting these payments is unacceptable. We look forward to your response with more details about your plans to improve the current system.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

³ Internal Revenue Service, *IRS adds phone operators to answer Economic Impact Payment questions*, 2020, available at <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-adds-phone-operators-to-answer-economic-impact-payment-questions>